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ALEXANDER THE GREAT VERSUS THE IRANIANS – AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE*

The present study analyzes some aspects of the policies of Alexander of Macedon, dubbed the Great, vis-à-vis the Iranians. A discussion is offered concerning developments of Alexander's policies towards the Iranians and Iranian cultural influences on Alexander and his Macedonian environment¹.

As Alexander crossed the Hellespont to Anatolia in 334 BC, a new chapter began in the history of both Europe and Western and Central Asia. Macedonia and Persia rose to fight for hegemony, a fight that would, for the Achaemenid empire, become a struggle for survival.

Ever since Darius I's army entered the Balkans (ca. 513 BC) and continued operating in western Thrace, the Macedonians and the Iranians had been no strangers². The Macedonians borrowed heavily from the Achaemenid empire's traditions in the economy and culture, even though Persian dominance in Thrace and Macedon was overthrown following the failure of Xerxes' invasion (480-479 BC). To the Macedonian king Philip II (359-336), Achaemenid Persia was an example in statehood (Kienast 1994; Badian 1996: 16; Olbrycht 2000; Olbrycht 2003). His court hosted Iranian exiles (Artabazos,

* References to literary and epigraphical evidence follow standard conventions, and the citations of journal titles in general conform to the format of *L'Année Philologique*.

¹ For a detailed account of Alexander's Iranian policy, see Olbrycht 2004 and Olbrycht 2007. Cf. Altheim 1953; Badian 1958, Badian 1996; Abel 1966; Schachermeyr 1973; Bosworth 1980; Wolski 1985-1988; Wolski 1990; Boyce, Grenet 1991: 3ff.; Wiesehöfer 1994a; Briant 1996; Briant 2003; Olbrycht 1996; Shahbazi 2003.

² On the early Persian-Macedonian relations, see Ginouvès, Hatzopoulos et al. (eds.) 1994: 16ff.; Borza 1992: 100ff.

Sisines, and Amminapes)³. Therefore it is hardly surprising that as he girded to fight Darius III, young Alexander III had acquired considerable knowledge of his adversary.

After Darius III's defeat at Gaugamela (331 BC), when Alexander stood at the gates of Babylonia, Susiana, and Persis, heretofore implacably hostile attitudes of Persians and other Iranians began to change. At that point, many Iranians concluded that Darius was bound to lose and that continued resistance was pointless. The Persian Mazaios, who had not long before valiantly fought against Alexander at Gaugamela, was appointed satrap of Babylon⁴. He was the first notable Iranian to go over to Alexander's side, receiving a high rank from him (another example is that of Mithrines of Sardes)⁵. In the Iranian area from Susiana to Paropamisos (Hindukush region), Alexander appointed more than a dozen satraps in 330/329 BC, of whom only one (in Arachosia) was Macedonian and the rest Iranian (Olbrycht 2004: 104f).

It was indicative of Alexander's newly developed concept of rule over conquered territories that he introduced the title of "King of Asia"⁶, which suggested a claim to a greater dominance than the Achaemenid monarchy ever embraced.

After a hard-won victory at Persian Gates (January 330 BC) Alexander encountered strong resistance points in Persis⁷. Even though the city of Persepolis surrendered without a fight, it was plundered just the same. Before moving out from what was the Achaemenid cradle, Alexander burned down the royal palaces of Persepolis. By and large, it should be admitted that while in Persis in 330 BC, Alexander did not make any conciliatory gestures in his policy toward the Persians and Iranians.

Darius' death at the hands of his Iranian officials (summer 330) gave Alexander room for more political maneuvering: from Darius' persecutor he suddenly turned his avenger. A complete about-face in Alexander's policies came about as he entered the Parthia-Hyrkania satrapy in eastern Iran (Olbrycht 2004: 26-28). So far, Alexander had concentrated on military conquest of Asia. But his empire needed institutions, court, ceremonies, and a defined state

³ Curt. 3.7.11; 6.4.25; Arr. 3.22.1; Diod. 16.52.3; Athen. 6.256.

⁴ Arr. 3.16.4. Cf. Curt. 5.1.43f.

⁵ Diod. 17.64.6; Curt. 5.1.44; Arr. 3.16.5.

⁶ Plut. Alex. 34.1. Alexander thought that since the kings of the Persians and Medes did not control "even a fraction of Asia", they could not claim the title of Great Kings (Arr. 7.1.2-3). In reality, however, Alexander's empire did not embrace the entire lands of the Achaemenids, e.g. outside it lay Armenia and most of Cappadocia. Another view of the title "King of Asia" presents Nawotka 2004.

⁷ Alexander in Persis: Borza 1972; Wirth 1993; Wiesehöfer 1994.

concept. Alexander had not taken any major steps to that end in the old Achaemenid centers of Persis, Susiana, or Media but he did in east Iranian Parthia. In the late summer or fall of 330 BC, Alexander ostentatiously stood up as an admirer of Iranian ways. Not without reason did Diodorus (18.48.5) call Alexander “an admirer (*zelotes*) of Persian customs”.

Among Alexander’s innovations in the year 330 BC, the most spectacular was his acceptance of Iranian dress and regalia⁸. The act was designed to ingratiate him with the Iranians. The Roman historian Arrian (7.29.4) stresses that Alexander’s acceptance of vestments and insignia was a shrewd move to win barbarians over to his side. Indeed, Alexander was so intent on adopting Iranian customs that he attempted to master archery and chariot riding⁹. Those were abilities that were inseparably bound up with the Achaemenid Great King but formerly alien to monarchs in Macedon.

Alexander’s concept of royal rule in Asia was being filled with a new content in Central Asia as is aptly described by Plutarch, who used such notions as mixing up and community (Greek *anakrasis* and *koinonia*)¹⁰. In Bactria-Sogdiana, Alexander married the Iranian princess Roxana¹¹. Many of his Macedonian officers married Iranian women¹². Later on in Susa, in 324 BC, Alexander and his 91 generals, took wives from the Iranian aristocracy¹³.

While in Parthia, Alexander assumed the principal items of Iranian dress and Achaemenid regalia, but not all details of that are clear (Cf. Neuffer 1929; Ritter 1965: 31ff.). Sources agree that Alexander wore a purple Iranian chiton with white trimmings, a belt, and a diadem. Also an Iranian cloak called *kandys* was part of the king’s attire.

Elements of Iranian dress appear on artifacts from the Diadochoi period (323-280 BC) as the garb of many Macedonians. And so, on Alexander Sarcophagus the king (shown in a battle scene) is wearing an Iranian chiton with tight sleeves and an Iranian-style cloak (Olbrycht 2004, ill. 4.15). Similarly

⁸ Curt. 6.6.1-11; Diod. 17.77.4-7; Arr. 4.7.4; Plut. Alex. 45.1-3, 47.5; Eratosthenes, FGrHist 241 F 30 ap. Plut. De fort. Al. 1.8; Ephippus, FGrHist F 5 = Athen. 12.537E-538B; Iust. 12.3.8-12; Metz Epitome 2. Details in Olbrycht 2004: 286-293.

⁹ Plut. De fort. 2.6; Alex. 23.1-4; 57.3. The famous painter Apelles accomplished two paintings depicting Alexander in a chariot, see Stewart 1993: 172.

¹⁰ Plut. Alex. 47.5.

¹¹ Curt. 8.4.21-30; Diod. 17, arg.; Arr. 4.19.5f.; Plut. Alex. 47.7f.; Plut. De fort. 1.11 (Mor. 332E), 2.6 (Mor. 338D); Strab. 11.11.4; Metz Epitome 28-31.

¹² Diod. 17, arg.; Metz Epitome 31.

¹³ On the marriages between Macedonians and Iranian women in Susa, see Diod. 17.107.6; Arr. 7.4.1-8; 7.6.2; Plut. Alex. 70.3; Iust. 12.10.9-10; Phylarchos, FGrHist 81 F 41 = Athen. 12.539B-540A; Chares FGrHist 125 F 4 = Athen. 12.538B - 539A.

dressed, a Macedonian sometimes identified as Hephaestion is shown in a Beotian helmet (Olbrycht 2004, ill. 4.11). In a painting from the Kinch Tomb, a Macedonian horseman is wearing an Iranian-style chiton (Olbrycht 2004, ill. 2.14).

According to writers of the Vulgate tradition, Alexander persuaded his Companions (*hetairoi*) to wear Iranian dress¹⁴. It included the *kandys* cloaks and double chitons seen worn by all mounted Macedonians, i.e., *hetairoi*, shown on Alexander Sarcophagus. Like the style of the vestments, the very gift of clothing to subjects clearly emulates the Persian tradition. Alexander was making a conscious reference to the great Achaemenid king Cyrus II, who had given away Median clothing to Persian dignitaries and commanders after defeating the Medes¹⁵. Moreover, the *hetairoi*'s horses received "Persian" trappings from the king¹⁶, another echo of Cyrus' practice.

In addition to literary records confirming Alexander's use of an Iranian tiara and diadem, more evidence is found in the royal iconography on Alexander's coins. Some of his monetary issues in Asia Minor (Sardes), Egypt (Memphis), and Syria (Bambyke/Hierapolis) bear his likeness in an upright tiara (Olbrycht 2004: 298ff.; Olbrycht 2007a; Olbrycht 2007b). Those coins offer clear proof how well Alexander understood the established Eastern symbolism of the upright Iranian tiara.

Immediately after Darius' death more than 1,000 Iranian dignitaries surrendered to Alexander. Most prominent among them was Darius' brother Oxyathres, now admitted into the ranks of the Macedonian Companion cavalry¹⁷. Moreover, Oxyathres was given the command of a new guard formation consisting of Iranian nobles and called in the sources *doryphoroi*¹⁸. This guard was built up during Alexander's campaign in Central Asia¹⁹.

From 330 BC onwards, Alexander yielded to Iranian influence in court ceremonial and in court offices (Cf. Collins 2001). In 330 BC, the Iranian court-guard *rhabdouchoi* was established, which controlled the access to the king also in regard to the Macedonians. The *rhabdouchoi* appeared later in a very important moment, when in the face of the Macedonian mutiny at Opis (324 BC) they were entrusted with guarding (*phylake*) the king²⁰.

¹⁴ Curt. 6.6.7; Diod. 17.77.5; Iust. 12.3.9.

¹⁵ Xen. Kyr. 8.3.1-5.

¹⁶ Diod. 17.77.5.

¹⁷ Plut. Alex. 43.7. Cf. Curt. 6.2.10.

¹⁸ Diod. 17.77.4.

¹⁹ Curt. 7.10.9; Diod. 17, κβ'; Plut. Alex. 51.1.

²⁰ Plut. Alex. 71.3.

Essential element in our understanding of Alexander's reign is his colonization program which should be seen in closer connection with king's policy towards various population segments, especially the Iranians. In 330 BC, Alexander initiated a big colonization in Iran and Central Asia, extended thereafter into India and Babylonia (Olbricht 2004: 205ff.). Overall, each satrapy in northern Iran from Parthia to Paropamisos acquired at least one urban colony. One each was founded in Parthia (Alexandropolis in Parthia), Margiana (here apart from the metropolis called Alexandreia, there were six fortified settlements), Drangiana including the country of the Ariaspai (Alexandreia in Sakastan), and Arachosia (Alexandreia or Alexandropolis). Two colonies are known to have existed in Areia (Alexandreia and Herakleia) and three in Paropamisos (Alexandreia, a colony near Alexandreia, and Nikaia), which suggests strategic importance of those regions. A similar colonization pattern is seen in southern Iran and Babylonia, where no satrapy was left that did not have a colony. Those created there included Alexandreia in Babylonia, Alexandreia in Susiana (later renamed Charax), Alexandreia in Persis, Alexandreia in Karmania, Alexandreia in Gedrosia or Makarene, Alexandreia in the land of the Oreites, Rhambakia, and Arbis oppidum (on the borders of India).

In the sources three groups of settlers in Alexander's foundations in Iran and Central Asia are attested: Iranians, Greeks and Macedonians. The status of these three population segments can be reconstructed mainly due to the evidence concerning the foundations in Paropamisos, Alexandreia Eschate and some other colonies in India and Iran (Olbricht 2004: 262-268; Olbricht 2004a).

Contrary to the view that as settlers they had a strong motive to support the colonies living there by exploiting the labour of the natives, the Graeco-Macedonian colonists remained reluctantly in the new foundations. Particularly deep and dangerous for Alexander proved the dissatisfaction of Hellenes who were often ruthlessly compelled to settle in new cities. The character of these colonies, and especially their internal structure, did not comply with requirements of the Greeks. They missed Greek customs and manner of life and "submitted while the king was alive through fear"²¹. A bone of contention for Hellenes was the position of Iranians and other Asiatics in the colonies. Moreover, cities were strictly controlled by king's supervisors and did not possess any wider autonomy. This is evident in case of Alexandreia in Paropamisos²². In view of troubles with the Greek settlers Alexander decided in 323 BC to make use of the population of Phoenicia and Syria as colonists in the foundations at the Persian Gulf²³. Malcontent were essentially also

²¹ Diod. 18.7.1ff.

²² Curt. 7.3.23; Arr. 4.22.4-5.

²³ Arr. 7.19.5.

Macedonian colonists for they had to – in spite of their military efforts – share rule with the conquered. Iranian settlers possessed formally equal rights with Macedonians and Hellenes (case of Alexandreia Eschate)²⁴. The high status of Iranian colonists emerged as a result of Alexander's Iranian policies proclaimed in 330 BC. This status became even more evident when Alexander recruited in new foundations young Iranians for his royal phalanx²⁵. The free Iranian, Macedonian and Greek settlers economically relied on serfs and slaves, mostly of Iranian descent²⁶.

For an assessment of Alexander's Asian policy, and his colonization in particular, highly valuable insight is afforded by Aristotle's letter to Alexander titled *On policies toward Greek cities*. The letter was only preserved in an Arabic version and has been excellently published, with translation and commentary, by M. Plezia and J. Bielawski (Bielawski, Plezia 1970. Cf. Plezia 1961; Plezia 1965; Plezia 1968; Plezia 1969/1970). In Aristotle's vision, founding new cities was to be the mainspring of Alexander's rule and statehood. Alexander proved to be a diligent disciple of his renowned master. He realized full well what role could be played by newly created cities in his empire-building, just as he showed appreciation of generosity and friendly acts toward his subjects. Still, he was not blindly obeying the philosopher's instructions, but gave them a new body. Aristotle saw the proposed foundations as Greek cities – *poleis*, but Alexander introduced the concept of mixed colonies, no longer coterminous with the Greek *polis* (Olbrycht 2004: 276f.).

Alexander could appreciate the importance of colonies in consolidating the state by observing the policies of his father, Philip II, ever eager to establish new foundations²⁷. There was one more important example to follow: Dionysios of Syracuse, whose life Alexander studied during his Asian expedition²⁸. The Persian king Cyrus, whom Alexander admired, had also founded cities, among them Kyreschata on the Syrdaria (in Central Asia) and Pasargadai (in Persis)²⁹.

The surge in pro-Iranian innovations surprised most Macedonians, who were opposed to them. A conflict mounted between Alexander, who was

²⁴ Curt. 7.6.27; Arr. 4.4.1. See Olbrycht 2004: 263f.; Olbrycht 2004b.

²⁵ Arr. 7.6.1.

²⁶ Curt. 7.11.29. Cf. Olbrycht 2004: 267-268.

²⁷ Philippopolis: Theopompos, FGrHist 115 F 110. Philippi: Diod. 16.71.1-2; App. BC 4.105f.; IG II² 127.45). Cf. Borza 1992: 214f.

²⁸ Plut. Alex. 8.3 names Philistos who wrote a biography of Dionysios.

²⁹ Pasargadai: Strab. 15.3.8. Kyreschata/Kyroupolis: Strab. 11.11.4; Arr. 4.2.2. Cf. Olbrycht 2004: 276.

yielding to “barbary” and increasingly relying on his Iranian subjects, and traditionally-minded Macedonians. Source accounts often quote the chief accusations hurled by Macedonians at Alexander³⁰. A long list of such accusations appeared in the sources describing the events during Alexander’s stay in Susa in 324 BC: recruiting Iranian soldiers called *epigonoī*, wearing “Median” dress, introducing wedding ceremonies after the Persian rite, admission of Iranian cavalrymen into the ranks of the Companions (*hetairoī*) and the royal guard (*agema*), expanding the whole cavalry by enlisting “barbarians.” The main complaint targeted the entire behavior of Alexander, who had “completely changed into a barbarian” and abandoned Macedonian ways³¹.

Incited at Susa, Alexander’s conflict with masses of Macedonians mounted to a peak at Opis (324 BC). An open revolt was staged, but by then Alexander had built a perfect substitute for the rebellious Macedonians in the form of an Iranian phalanx force called in Greek sources *epigonoī* or *‘antitagma’*³². As the reasons for their displeasure, the rebellious Macedonians pointed again to the king’s Persian dress, enlistment of “barbarian” *epigonoī*, and inclusion of barbarians in the *hetairoī*. Scorn was poured on Alexander for claiming recognition as a son of god or even a god. Desires for deification and acceptance of Iranian customs are quoted in sources as the main causes for Alexander’s moral decline³³.

For a judgment of Alexander’s Iranian policies, of particular import are his anti-Macedonian actions at Opis, as related by ancient authors. All the significant elements of Alexander’s pro-Iranian policies, his appreciation of Iranian obedience and discipline, the importance of his marriage to Roxana and to Darius’ daughter, and the liaisons of Alexander’s “closest friends” with Asian women – all appear in Alexander’s speech to the Iranians at Opis, as transmitted by Curtius Rufus. The king was quoted as saying, *Asiae et Europae unum atque idem regnum est*, and referring to the Iranians as his citizens and soldiers (*cives* and *milites*)³⁴. No different from this account is Alexander’s program expressed by Arrian in his description of the feast at Opis: a prayer for harmony (*homonoia*) and for community under one state (*koinonia tes arches*)

³⁰ On Macedonian resistance to Alexander, see Heckel 1996; Olbrycht 2004: 31ff.

³¹ Arr. 7.6.1-5.

³² Arr. 7.6.1; Diod. 17.108.1-2, 17.110.1-2; Plut. Alex. 71; Iust. 12.4.11; 12.12.4.

³³ Mutiny at Opis: Arr. 7.8-11; Curt. 10.2.8-4.3; Diod. 17.108.3, 17.109.2f.; Plut. Alex. 71.2-9; Iust. 12.11.4-12.10. Cf. Badian 1965; Schachermeyr 1973: 492ff.

³⁴ Curt. 10.3.7-14.

for Macedonians and “Persians”, i.e. Iranians³⁵. In Alexander’s concept, both the Iranians and the Macedonians were the dominant peoples in his empire.

In contemporary research, Alexander’s pro-Iranian policies are often viewed as merely “pragmatic” (Fredricksmeier 2000: 165f.). Nonetheless, claims for narrow pragmatism fall short of explaining many of Alexander’s fundamental and far-reaching moves such as his marriage to the Iranian princess from Central Asia Roxana (it would have been more “pragmatic” to place her at the court as a concubine) or the creation of an Iranian phalanx to replace the existing Macedonian force. The complete dominance of Iranians in Alexander’s army in 324–323 BC is another move overstepping the boundaries of simple necessity (Olbrycht 2004: 192–204). The fact should be given due recognition that the ambitious Alexander, ever eager to search for new forms of monarchy – forms reaching beyond the Macedonian tradition, where the king’s role was quite limited – had discovered in royal Persian traditions those elements that best suited his need to build and strengthen the new empire.

Alexander’s position vis-à-vis the Iranians, as proclaimed in 330 BC and implemented in the following years, is in many respects reminiscent of the attitude of Cyrus the Great (559–530 BC) and his successors toward the Medes. In the Achaemenid state, the Medes occupied a position nearly equal to that of the Persians. We know that Alexander honored Cyrus’ memory³⁶ and it is quite likely that his concept of Iranian empowerment was styled after the pro-Median policies of Cyrus and his successors.

Iranian traditions, by and large, show an ambivalent attitude toward Alexander the Great. A complimentary picture of Alexander as a hero or even a sage is seen in the tradition based on the so-called *Alexander Romance*, a collection based on a Greek story by whom is referred to in studies as Pseudo-Callisthenes (Yarshater 1983: 472f.; Wiesehöfer 1994a; Maciuszak 1999).

By contrast, the priestly Pahlavi tradition portrays Alexander as “accursed” or a “devil” and numbers him, together with Afrasiab and Zahhak, among Iran’s greatest enemies (Wiesehöfer 1994a: 395). During Alexander’s military operations in Persis, especially in Persepolis³⁷, and in Ecbatana³⁸, a number of Iranian priests must have been killed by the Macedonians (Boyce 1982: 228f.). Some Macedonian commanders showed no reluctance

³⁵ Arr. 7.11.9. Cf. Plut. Alex. 70.3.

³⁶ Curt. 10.1.30; Arr. 6.24.3; Arr. Ind. 9.10; Plut. Alex. 69. Cf. Due 1993; Schachermeyr 1973: 315, n. 364; Wiesehöfer 1994: 36, n. 80.

³⁷ On the slaughters and destructions in Persis, see Diod. 17.69–73.1; Curt. 5.5.1–2, 5.6.11. Cf. Olbrycht 2004: 23f.

³⁸ Ecbatana: Polyb. 10.27.6ff.; cf. Arr. 7.14.5; Iust. 42.3.5.

in suppressing Iranian opposition³⁹. Thus, it is not surprising that several Pahlavi texts tell how “accursed” Alexander came to Iran, slew priests and destroyed the *Avesta*⁴⁰.

Monetary issues attributed to Alexander include decadrachms with peculiar iconography (Olbrycht 2004: 299-303). Containing clear references to the war in India, decadrachm issues are interpreted as commemorating Alexander’s victory over Indian king Poros. They were probably struck not long after the Indian campaign, perhaps in Susa or Babylon in 324-323 BC. Alexander’s headgear on decadrachms seems to be a combination of the Iranian upright tiara with elements of a Macedonian helmet. Seen by Macedonians, Alexander’s headgear resembled a military helmet, while to Iranians it looked like the royal upright tiara. It seems that the twin meaning of the iconography of decadrachms and other coins reflects a deliberate move: the renditions on coins were meant to appeal to Macedonians and Iranians alike. The winged figure crowning Alexander may be treated as a personification of the Iranian “royal glory” (*khvarenah*) a powerful message to the Iranians. The king is holding a thunderbolt in his hand (an attribute of Zeus) – an element suggesting deification while still alive⁴¹.

Some Alexander’s tetradrachms are known bearing the figure of a soldier shooting a large bow on the obverse and an elephant on the reverse. Several known tetradrachms feature an archer in a quadriga, with an elephant and two people on the reverse. An archer figure appealed to Iranians, proficiency with the bow being a highly valued skill among them (Olbrycht 2004: 305f.). It seems to have been the issuer’s intention to refer to Iranian tradition to emphasize the Iranian contribution to the Indian campaign. An archer in a chariot, known from some of Alexander’s coins, is another borrowing from Iranian tradition. All in all, it seems that decadrachms and tetradrachms with an elephant and standing archer (or elephant and chariot archer) were special issues struck in 324-323 BC on Alexander’s orders after his return from India and intended mainly for Iranians. They composed a majority in Alexander’s invading army in India and were a co-decisive force in the showdown with Poros and in other struggles in the Indus valley.

Pro-Iranian political tendencies at Alexander’s time and increased contacts of the Macedonians and Hellenes with Iranian traditions were reflected

³⁹ Curt. 10.1.1-9; Arr. 6.27.3-5. See Olbrycht 2004: 43.

⁴⁰ DkM 405.13-407.3; DkM 411.11-413.12; *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag* 1.5-6; *Tansar Nāmag* 11; *Abdīh ud sahīgīn ī Sagastān* 9-15 (cf. Boyce, Grenet 1991: 16); *Šahristānīhā ī Ērān* 2-5. See Shaki 1981; Olbrycht 2007.

⁴¹ This is an analogy to the famous painting by Apelles. In its composition, the figure of Alexander resting against a spear finds close analogies in Greco-Persian gems of the 4th century BC., see Olbrycht 2004: 302.

in some of the monuments erected during his reign and later in the Diadochoi period (323-280 BC)⁴². Thus, Hephaestion's Pyre should be seen as an artifact combining evocative iconographic elements from Iranian culture with Macedonian and Greek motifs. After Alexander's death, a grand funerary carriage was built in which to carry the king's body to his tomb. The carriage was decorated to appeal not only to Macedonians but also to Asians, especially Iranians. Four painted boards were placed upon the cart. The first showed Alexander in a chariot (*harma*) holding a resplendent scepter. It was an image in full conformity with Iranian imagery. The king was shown surrounded by his guard (*therapeia*) composed of three groups: Macedonians, Iranian *melophoroi*, and *hoplophoroi*. Atop the cart's roof waved a *phoinikis*, a purple standard (such signs were used by the Achaemenids) linked with a large golden olive wreath. Sun rays reflected off the wreath producing a glistening twinkle resembling lightning when viewed from a distance. By analogy, a representation of the sun in a glittering crystal accompanied Achaemenid king Darius III⁴³.

One of the most magnificent artifacts of the Diadochoi period is the so-called Alexander Sarcophagus (Olbrycht 2004: 313-315). Its reliefs show scenes of two kinds: battle and hunting with Macedonians and Iranians in attendance. The latter must have been not just native Iranians but probably also other Asians dressed in the Iranian fashion. Many iconographic elements in dress and armament indicate that the owner of the tomb (rather Laomedon or someone else than Abdalonymos) was making references to traditions of both Iran and Macedonia. The Macedonian cavalry wears twin-tied chitons with long tight sleeves – an Iranian garment. In one of the pediment reliefs, Iranians defeat Macedonians or Greeks: this is probably a reference to fighting in the Diadochoi period (possibly a Greek rebellion in Upper Satrapies quelled by Peithon's mostly Iranian army). In sum, Iranians appear in two scenes with Macedonian-Greek armament. That they had such armament is not surprising if we remember that Alexander created the Iranian phalanx formation called *epigonoi*. The owner of the tomb was probably trying to highlight that reform by Alexander. The choice of the twin subjects: war and hunting reflected attachment to the Iranian ethos known from Achaemenid art in Asia Minor (chiefly Lycia and Phrygia Hellespontica) and the Levant, and also from royal seals and artifacts from the Oxos hoard.

The Alexander Mosaic is among the most controversial artifacts connected with the great Macedonian conqueror (Olbrycht 2004: 316-319). Its iconography is striking for its compositional emphasis is placed on Darius III on the right. A strong resemblance is seen between the message of the mosaic

⁴² Details in Olbrycht 2004: 307-326.

⁴³ Curt. 3.3.8.

and descriptions of battles by Curtius Rufus, Plutarch, and Diodorus. The imagery in the painting was meant to convey not only Alexander's victory, but also Iranian gallantry. It is possible that the original painting was first made in Babylonia or in the Levant under Seleukos I.

Alexander's conquests in Asia led to the creation of a new empire combining – as once the state of Cyrus the Great and Darius the Great had – many peoples with their varied cultures and traditions. Like the first Achaemenids before him, Alexander contributed – partly by deliberate action (his images on coins, in painting and sculpture) – to the creation of a royal iconography and an “imperial style.” The Macedonian conqueror became an admirer of Iranian customs and adopted the chief regalia of the Achaemenids complete with elements of Iranian dress. Iran exerted a strong influence on Alexander's concept of monarchy and on Macedonian ethos. Art of the time of Alexander and the Diadochoi tends to show the ruler or his imitators in battle or hunting scenes. This choice of subject matter is principally of Iranian origin. Conscious borrowing from Iranian tradition in iconographic elements (such as the diadem as a royal insigne of Hellenistic rulers) and choice of subjects defined the main tendencies in art at the time of Alexander as the king of Asia and in the Diadochoi period.

To sum up: in 330, Alexander initiated a new policy toward the Iranians as was manifested by the acceptance of Iranian ceremonial, dress, and regalia, by Alexander's marriage to Roxana, the marriages of his companions with Iranian women from Central Asia (327), later by the marriages of the king and the hetairoi with Iranian women at Susa (324). In 330, Alexander, moreover, began to introduce Iranians to his army and formed Iranian guards.

Alexander consciously styled himself as an Iranian ruler rather than just a Persian one; his court and ceremony reforms and his colonization he initiated not in Persis, but in north-eastern Iran (Parthia). Alexander counted on his colonies as the mainstay – with the field army and occupation forces – of his power in the empire⁴⁴. The importance of colonies in empire-building was stressed by Aristotle in his letter to the king which could have provided a decisive stimulus for the colonization program begun in Asia.

In general, Alexander followed the example of Cyrus the Great, who had built the elite of the Persian empire from Persians and Medes. But those were two related Iranian peoples. Unlike them, Iranians and Macedonians belonged to different cultures and traditions. Some Iranians supported Alexander as they stood to gain considerably in political stature: from the defeated they would become co-rulers in an empire.

⁴⁴ Cf. Curt. 10.2.8.

The king's pro-Iranian policy was opposed by a multitude of dissatisfied Macedonians. Faced with resistance by parts of Iranians, many Macedonians and discontent of Hellenes, Alexander was unable to ensure his empire coherence and long life. Yet some items in his pro-Iranian agenda could not be obliterated after his death. Iranians had secured too strong a footing to be openly challenged and to have their aspirations widely thwarted. For this reason, they continued to be a major political-military force in Western Asia in the Diadochoi era. Many of Alexander's pro-Iranian innovations were abandoned after he died, but the status of Iranians – though in many ways lower than in 330-323 BC – remained strong enough for each Macedonian satrap and the Diadochoi wishing to rule on Iranian soil to solicit support from native inhabitants (in particular, this applied to Peithon, Peukestas, and Eumenes). The political-military support of Iranians proved decisive in securing the rule in Western and Central Asia of Seleukos and his wife Apame, the daughter of Spitamenes, and in creation of the Macedonian-Iranian empire of the Seleukids (Olbrycht 2004a; Olbrycht 2005).

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